

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM DEAN  
MCKAMEY

**HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, April 4, 2014*

Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, today a memorial service is being held for William Dean McKamey at the United States Naval Academy.

Will was a young man for whom I had the privilege of nominating to the Naval Academy. A former Mr. Football winner from Grace Christian Academy, Will unfortunately passed away on March 25 after having collapsed during football practice the previous Saturday.

Will was one of the most outstanding men I have had the privilege of meeting. From all of the things I have read and heard, this young man had an incredibly bright future. He was outstanding in every way.

Will was only 19 years-old when he died, but, in his short life, he touched many lives personally and has inspired thousands of lives in my home state of Tennessee and around the Country as people learn about him.

Will was a committed Christian, and his mother Kara has noted that "Will was able to change the spirit of a community, a school and a Navy football team . . . without really saying a word."

I had the honor to attend Will's funeral service, and I saw firsthand the impact Will has had on his community.

Tennessee and the Navy football family mourn the loss of such a great young man: a son, a friend, a teammate, and a Christian.

IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE  
OF KASSAB, SYRIA

**HON. FRANK R. WOLF**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, April 4, 2014*

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in solidarity with the people of Kassab, Syria. Their town was overtaken by Islamist rebels late last month. The town's inhabitants, who are largely Armenian Christians, have been forced by jihadist rebels to evacuate their homes and seek refuge in Lebanon and the nearby city of Latakia. I submit an article which ran in yesterday's Washington Post which paints a deeply disturbing picture of the events unfolding in Kassab.

This is yet another case of Christians and other religious minorities being pulled into violent conflicts in the Middle East. Throughout the region, small and peaceful minority groups are often the first to suffer collateral damage, as we have seen in recent years not only in Syria, but also in Iraq, in Egypt, and elsewhere.

It is especially poignant to recognize the people of Kassab at this time of year, since April 24 is the Genocide Remembrance Day observed by Armenians around the world to commemorate the atrocities committed against their people nearly a hundred years ago.

I have advocated for a non-governmental bipartisan Syria Study Group to bring a fresh approach and possibly creative solutions forward to address the ongoing conflict in that

country. It is inexcusable for the world to stand by while families are being driven from their homes, children are being killed and ancient communities' very existence threatened.

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 2, 2014]

SYRIAN ARMENIANS, WHO HAD BEEN INSULATED FROM WAR, FORCED TO FLEE AFTER REBEL OFFENSIVE

(By Loveday Morris)

ANJAR, LEBANON.—Some fled in their nightclothes, others in their farming boots straight from the fields. Many thought they'd be able to return in a few hours but now fear they may never again.

Until the shells started raining down late last month, the tiny Syrian village of Kassab and surrounding villages had been largely sheltered from the three-year-old conflict that has devastated other parts of Syria. But now the area is the focus of a rebel offensive in the coastal province of Latakia, and an accompanying social-media storm of disinformation.

Kassab, a lush, mountainous idyll abutting the Turkish border, is an ancestral home of Syria's minority ethnic Armenians, Christians who have lived on the land for a millennium. But the attack by jihadist rebels sparked a mass exodus from Kassab and nearby villages.

The picturesque Armenian hillside villages in the north of Latakia provide a foothold for a push into the rest of the province—a heartland of Syria's minority Alawites, who are largely supportive of President Bashar al-Assad.

The area holds little other strategic value for the opposition, but the limited gains there have boosted rebel morale amid a string of defeats elsewhere, with the leader of the main opposition body, Ahmad al-Jarba, making a rare visit to Syria this week to tour the area and meet with fighters.

The Armenian diaspora, including some celebrities, has expressed outrage, demanding that the United States act to protect the Armenian community in Syria. The State Department has said it is "deeply troubled" by the developments.

Some Syrian government loyalists have launched a propaganda campaign accusing rebels of mass killings and desecrating churches in the area, sparking fierce rebuttals from opposition activists.

But the people of Kassab, like the 7 million others who have been displaced by the civil war, are focusing on trying to rebuild their lives after being torn from their land. At least 30 families have fled to neighboring Lebanon, seeking refuge in the Armenian village of Anjar and in the capital, Beirut, and the testimonies of more than a dozen shed some light on the events surrounding the offensive.

All but about 30 of the area's roughly 2,500 residents fled within 48 hours of the attack, they said. The fate of those who remained, who were too old or unwilling to leave, is unknown, with communications to the villages cut. There was no major loss of life, they say, with just one known death, that of a local teacher who was hit in her car by a sniper as she tried to flee. Still, the mass exodus is particularly emotional, with Armenians from Kassab having been forced to leave their homes twice in the past century because of persecution by the Turks.

The Armenians first fled during the Adana massacre of 1909, when tens of thousands died at the hands of the Ottomans.

Then, in 1915, as many as 5,000 residents of Kassab died during the fracturing empire's murderous campaign against the Armenians, which is widely recognized as a genocide.

"Now it's 2014, and we are being displaced again," said a 41-year-old farmer's wife who

arrived in Lebanon a week ago. Like others fleeing the loyalist area, she spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals if she and her family return.

"But thank God that this time there is no massacre," she said. "We believe that, as Armenians, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Once again, the Armenians see the hand of their long-standing enemy behind their displacement, saying the rebel attack was launched from Turkish soil. Many of the farms and homes in what was once a popular tourist spot offer sweeping views of the Turkish border.

The offensive, they say, began about 5 a.m. on March 21, with villagers waking to the sound of heavy machine-gun fire, followed by shelling.

Two Syrian border posts were first struck, according to the accounts of several residents. With the posts manned only by lightly armed Syrian border police, residents said there was little in the way of defense against the push by jihadist rebel groups, which included the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham.

Not long after, the main border crossing to Turkey fell, residents said.

Villagers had prepared evacuation plans. In case of an attack, instructions were for women and children to congregate in Nabaeen, a village farthest from the Turkish border, with a back road to the city of Latakia.

By 7 a.m., one Nabaeen farmer said, about 50 people had gathered at his house. "People were crying and yelling that they had nothing with them. Some were in their slippers and pajamas," he said. "It was a sad situation."

Despite the chaos, many grabbed the deeds to their houses—an instinct, they say, for a people with a history of displacement. Some of the men stayed behind to see how the situation developed.

"We left all our valuables and had nothing more than the clothes we were wearing," said one 40-year-old mother of three. As the shelling picked up, by 11 a.m. most of the families had left Nabaeen for the safety of Latakia, 35 miles south, as Syrian army reinforcements made their way north.

By March 23, the rebels had reached the center of Kassab. Villagers point to Turkey's shooting down of a Syrian jet attempting to hit the invading fighters later that day as further evidence of Turkish support for rebels.

A Turkish diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, said that no rebels are "deliberately" allowed to use the Turkish border and that if there was shelling into Kassab from Turkey on March 21, it was because of new rules of engagement, which allow the country's armed forces to retaliate when fired at to deter further attacks.

Turkey also said that the jet it shot down had strayed into its airspace.

Jihadist fighters who entered Kassab have gone to great lengths to stress that they are not desecrating churches or hurting civilians.

The mother of three said that after she arrived in Latakia with her children, she called home, and a man who identified himself as a member of Ja'hat al-Nusra answered.

"He said, 'Come back, why did you leave your home? We have come here to protect you,'" she recalled, though she added that he later said she should convert to Islam before returning. "I pleaded with him, 'Eat and drink whatever you like, but please don't destroy the house.'"

But Kassab's displaced residents are not convinced by the jihadists' assurances, and some fear they will never be able to feel safe